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## W.Va. delegate says office complex would help county

CHARLES TOWN, W.VA.

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Battle lines continue to be drawn over a controversial \$250 million office complex planned next to Harpers Ferry (W.Va.) National Historical Park.

On Thursday, Del. Bob Tabb told the Jefferson County Commission he believes the idea has merit because it would boost the county's tax base and be a source of jobs in the county.

Since county voters rejected casino table games for Charles Town Races & Slots and the new jobs they could have generated, the 6,000 jobs that could be created by redeveloping the so-called Old Standard Quarry site "could fill some gaps," said Tabb, D-Jefferson.

"I think it's a step forward, and I think it will help the tax base," Tabb said. "I think we really need to look at diversifying our economy."

Some people, including park officials, believe the proposed office complex would be too close to

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the park, and others have expressed concerns about traffic congestion it could cause in the Millville Road area off U.S. 340 where it is proposed.

There also has been concern about being able to see the complex from the park.

Tabb tried to deflate those arguments Thursday.

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In response to concerns about protecting the area's "viewshed," Tabb referred to a concrete plant and a flea market that operate in the area.

"Those weren't the most enjoyable things to look at," Tabb said.

Opponents have expressed concern about increasing traffic congestion, but Tabb said the complex could have the opposite effect.

Commuters from Maryland could end up working at the facility, meaning the morning rush hour traffic flow would be reversed to a westerly direction, Tabb said.

Commissioner Jim Surkamp quickly came to the defense of people who have opposed the project.

"We all want jobs," Surkamp said. "What we've all had to come to conclusion with, it's not in the right place."

To allow the project, the commission is considering whether to change the site's land use designation from agricultural to commercial.

The Jefferson County Planning Commission on Tuesday night decided that the project was not compatible with a comprehensive growth plan for the county. The findings of the planning commission will be sent to the commissioners to help them decide whether to rezone the property.

Commissioner Greg Corliss spoke favorably of the proposal on Thursday, and Commissioner Dale Manuel said the height of the office buildings can be negotiated if the project is allowed.

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- Jefferson County  
Commissioner Rusty Morgan

Manuel said rezoning the property also would allow for clean up of industrial waste on the property left over from the quarry operations.

"I'm listening to all of this," Manuel said.

Commissioner Rusty Morgan said he agreed with Surkamp's assessment of the situation.

"This is not a popular project," Morgan said.

The debate over the project has been going on for months, and first surfaced in a proposal to annex the property into the City of Charles Town. Opponents said the site was too far away from Charles Town, and the Charles Town City Council eventually rejected the annexation request.

The commissioners have been talking with their attorney, James Casimiro, about ways the design of the office complex could be controlled if it is allowed.

On Thursday, Casimiro discussed using "conditional zoning" or use of covenants to control the design.

Although the covenants would apply to anyone who owned the land, the approach is "not a recognized theory," Casimiro said.

The commission agreed Thursday to tour the Old Standard property on June 27 at 3 p.m., and possibly vote on whether to rezone it on June 28.